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Connecting sustainability initiatives with efficiency measures: an opportunity for business schools

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Abstract: One of the essential parts within the transition towards sustainable economies, is the way how higher education prepares its students for their future role in business. In order for them to contribute to corporate social responsibility within the enterprise context, they need specific skills and competences related to sustainable development. Derived from the societal role of business schools in preparing the future business leaders and entrepreneurs, the focus of this paper is the contribution of business schools to sustainability integration. The topic could be wider situated within the context of higher education for sustainable development, which aims at integrating competences for sustainable development into the curriculum, and integrating sustainability measures within campus operations, research and societal role. This reflective article looks at a business school context as a case for institutional efficiency measures. It describes how business schools could implement efficiency measures and apply instruments within their own context, looking at the campus as a 'living laboratory' for sustainability innovation. Three tools and instruments to foster sustainability integration on campus, its benefits and possible problems are described: Assessment Instrument for Sustainability in Higher Education; Ecological Footprint Analysis; and Principles for Responsible Management Education. It builds upon the data and results from several action research projects within two Belgian business schools. As a conclusion, the article reflects upon the essential characteristics of these initiatives, as a way to connect sustainability initiatives to efficiency measures. This may be an opportunity for business schools, not yet used to its full potential yet.

Keywords: AISHE, business school, ecological footprint analysis, efficiency measures, higher education, PRME, sustainability
JEL: I21, I23, Q01, Q56

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1. Introduction

Society today is facing major challenges regarding the economic system, the social welfare and environmental health. These challenges are often referred to as 'wicked problems', characterised by complexity and uncertainty (Rieckmann 2012). A transition towards sustainable economies is called upon, in which economic aspects are embedded within the social and ecological sphere. One of the essential parts within the transition towards sustainable economies, is the way how higher education prepares its students for their future role in business. In order for them to contribute to corporate social responsibility (CSR) within the enterprise context, students need specific skills and competences related to sustainable development (Lambrechts et al. 2009, 2013; Lans et al. 2014; Wiek et al., 2011). Furthermore, higher education institutions (HEIs) are important actors in society themselves, so they need to lead by example and integrate sustainability measures in their own campus operations (Lozano et al. 2013; Waas et al. 2012).

Higher education for sustainable development (HESD) has become an important topic in international literature, with numerous papers and articles reporting on HEIs' actions and initiatives, and leading to the assumption that HEIs are making efforts for systemic change in their education, research, outreach and operations. Furthermore, current educational reforms expect high standards of HEIs when it comes to efficiency, accountability and management processes (Wals 2014). As a result of mergers, expectations of accreditation bodies and government, HEIs need to focus more on efficiency measures. This provides an opportunity to link the efficiency concept to the sustainability concept.

Certainly within a business (school) context, innovative approaches should be oriented towards introducing eco- and socio-efficiency to the economic efficiency (van Kleef and Roome 2007). In this sense, the discourse has moved beyond the bottom line towards the triple bottom line (e.g. Figge and Hahn 2004), in which the vague concept of sustainability has been translated into the business context along People (social aspects), Planet (ecological aspects) and Profit (economic aspects). Furthermore, Dyllick and Hockerts (2002) present six criteria when it comes to CSR: eco-efficiency, socio-efficiency, eco-effectiveness, socio-effectiveness, sufficiency and ecological equity (Dyllick and Hockerts 2002).

Derived from the societal role of business schools in preparing the future business leaders and entrepreneurs (Adams 2013), the focus of this paper is the participation in, and the

contribution of business schools to the issues of efficiency measures for sustainability. This topic could be wider situated within the context of HESD, which aims at integrating competences for sustainable development into the curriculum, and integrating sustainability measures within campus operations, research and societal role ('walk your talk'). The paper furthermore looks at a business school context as a case for institutional efficiency measures, in describing how business schools could implement efficiency measures and apply instruments within their own context, looking at the campus as a 'living laboratory' for sustainability innovation, in which academic curriculum activities are merged with campus operations (Cohen and Lovell, s.d. [2013]).

In order to guide the integration of SD in HEIs, and to a wider extent, take sustainability measures, a number of assessment tools and instruments is available (Lambrechts and Ceulemans 2013). The Assessment Instrument for Sustainability in Higher Education (AISHE) is specifically developed for a higher education context, and has been used in a number of HEIs worldwide (Roorda 2013). Other HEIs used existing instruments to assess or guide their SD integration efforts (Ceulemans et al. 2015, in press), one of which is the ecological footprint analysis (EFA), offering opportunities for HEIs to analyse their ecological performance and introduce it into their education and operations (Lambrechts and Van Liedekerke 2014). Specifically within the context of business schools, the United Nations Principles for Responsible Management Education (UN PRME, 2015) offer guiding principles to integrate sustainability measures within their education. A growing number of business schools worldwide become signatory of these principles, and analysis of their actions and efforts towards embedding these principles, show that the main focus is set on curriculum change (Godemann et al. 2014).

This article focuses on the application of these tools in two Belgian business schools. The methods used are described in section 2. Section 3 presents the results of the analysis, section 4 further discusses the outcomes and links back to insights from previous research and literature. Section 5 presents the conclusion and some recommendations for further research on this topic.

2. Method

The method used is an exploratory, comparative analysis of three cases in which sustainability (assessment) instruments have been applied within the context of two Belgian

business schools. The analysis is based on document analysis of internal reports in which the cases are described, and further elaborates on published peer reviewed articles on some of the cases.

The first Belgian business school providing cases in this paper is the Department of Business Studies of the University Colleges Leuven-Limburg (UCLL), a business school offering professional bachelor programs in business management and office management, with the study programs of marketing, accountancy and fiscal studies, finance and insurance, paralegal practice, business translation and interpreting, management assistant and medical management assistant. The second business school is the Antwerp Management School (AMS), affiliated with the University of Antwerp. This business school offers master programs in global management, business studies, finance, global supply chain management, innovation and entrepreneurship, management, human resource management.

Table 1 provides an overview of the three cases analysed in this paper. The first case is the application of the Assessment Instrument for Sustainability in Higher Education (AISHE) in the UCLL Department of Business Studies. This business school has a tradition of applying the AISHE-instrument in its study programs, with four assessments based on the first version of AISHE, in 2003, 2004, 2009 and 2010, and three assessments based on the new version AISHE 2.0 in 2015. A full description of AISHE is provided in section 3.

Table 1. Overview of the three cases

	Case	**Main focus in HEI**	**Main topic**	**Link with efficiency measures**	**Described in**
1.	AISHE	Education	Integration of SD	Defining criteria, current situation and desired situation	Lambrechts and Ceulemans (2013)
2.	EFA	Campus operations	Environmental performance	Defining indicators, current situation and desired situation	Lambrechts and Van Liedekerke (2014)
3.	PRME	Education	Integration of SD	Stakeholder involvement	Deparcq (2014)

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The second case is the application of the Ecological Footprint Analysis (EFA) in the UCLL Department of Business Studies. In 2011-2012, this business school was one of the first in

Belgium to calculate its Ecological Footprint of campus operations, with the involvement of different stakeholders (especially the students). The method and results are described in section 3.

The third case is the application of the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) within AMS. This business school used the PRME principles as a first step in orienting towards the integration of SD and CSR principles within the curricula of the different master programs.

A framework to analyse these cases was developed using bench learning methods. The framework builds upon the following key questions and prescriptive parameters:

Q1. What approach is used in the instrument? Parameters: qualitative, quantitative or combined information.

Q2. What type of information does the instrument offer? Parameters: principles, criteria, indicators, or a combination.

Q3. What is the type of stakeholder involvement in the instrument? Parameters: informing, consulting, dialogue and participation with/of different stakeholders.

Q4. What is the contribution of the instrument to efficiency measures within the business school? Parameters: policy planning, policy development, integration of tools and indicators in existing processes.

In an exploratory approach, the use and application of the instruments was analysed, with specific attention towards their position within the general sustainability integration process, and the current trend to take efficiency measures in higher education.

3. Results

The first case focuses on the use of AISHE within a business schools' context. The Department of Business Studies of UCLL applied the instrument four times, offering a considerable amount of information about the experiences of the instrument. The practical results of the AISHE-assessments, including an evaluation of the instruments' strengths and weaknesses, have been described in depth in Lambrechts and Ceulemans (2013). AISHE is based on quality management models using the Deming-cycle (Plan-Do-Check-Act), and defines twenty criteria about the integration of SD in higher education. The focus of the instrument lies within education

and curriculum, although some criteria also make a connection toward policy, campus operations and research aspects within the HEI (Roorda 2001).

The experiences of UCLL with the AISHE instrument have led to a number of findings. First, the structure of the instrument, based on quality-management, and the process-oriented approach are seen as major strengths. Furthermore, the interactive process in which different stakeholders are involved, triggers awareness-raising among participants. Lastly, the results offer possibilities to further work on the topic and contribute to policy development (Lambrechts and Ceulemans 2013). AISHE offers a qualitative approach, in which twenty criteria are interpreted by the group of participants. A mix of different stakeholders is involved: teaching staff, administrative staff, management, students, external stakeholders. With this approach the instrument offers opportunities for business schools to introduce stakeholder involvement at the level of the study program. The instrument does not present quantitative indicators, however, in providing a score between 0 and 5, the results regarding the qualitative criteria are in some way presented in a quantitative way. The instrument could have the potential to provide input for efficiency measures, but the strengths are more oriented in providing an interactive and process-oriented approach to integrate SD in a particular HEI. However references are made towards policy development in this particular HEI (Lambrechts 2015, in press), for some reason, the use of AISHE has not lead to considerable procedural changes regarding sustainability efficiency measures in the UCLL. Reasons for this could be found within other influencing factors, mainly the lack of structural embedding the topic (Verhulst and Lambrechts 2015, in press). However AISHE is oriented towards educational criteria, a new version called AISHE 2.0 has been developed. In this new version, a module concerning campus operations is also included (Roorda et al. 2009), which might offer opportunities to analyse sustainability efficiency measures in operations.

The second case focuses on the use of another instrument within UCLL, the application of ecological footprint analysis (EFA). The EFA is a quantitative instrument, offering indicators on different topics of campus operations: direct energy use, water use, mobility, procurement, waste, food and infrastructure. The input for these qualitative indicators is found in different departments of the HEI, e.g. the financial department, procurement department, etc. In that sense, the instrument is much more technical than the AISHE instrument, and only requires the input of numbers by the appointed department. Stakeholders are thus not actively involved in the process

of applying the instrument, they merely are consulted to deliver figures and numbers. However, the results of the EFA provide major opportunities to integrate SD efficiency measures within the campus operations. Within UCLL, a set of scenarios was developed to envision the effect of lowering electricity use, paper use and mobility. Furthermore, the initiative led to the development of quantitative and qualitative criteria to be followed up by the financial department, based on the information of procurement and invoices (Lambrechts and Van Liedekerke 2014).

The third case is the application of the United Nations Principles of Responsible Management Education (PRME) within the context of a business school. The Antwerp Management School (AMS), was the first Belgian business school to sign up to PRME in 2012. PRME is based on six main principles: (1) purpose, oriented towards capabilities of students; (2) values, oriented towards social responsibility; (3) method, oriented towards educational approaches; (4) research, oriented towards conceptual and empirical research on sustainability; (5) partnership, oriented towards managers and business corporations; (6) dialogue, oriented towards all internal and external stakeholders (UN PRME, 2015). The flexible framework of six principles provide guidance for business schools to integrate sustainability within their education, research, outreach activities and campus operations. After signing the PRME principles, AMS developed a "Sharing Information on Progress-report" (SIP), in which the HEI presented its interpretation and achievements within each principle (Deparcq 2014). The application of PRME provides a qualitative and reflective instrument. Within a business school, one can reflect on the initiatives to integrate sustainability within different aspects. Ideally, it requires the involvement of all internal and external stakeholders. The reflective nature of the instrument does not directly infuse sustainability efficiency measures, but guides critical thinking about certain sustainability initiatives.

Each of these cases has been analysed using the benchlearning framework described in section 2. The results of the analysis regarding the four key questions is presented in table 2. The table shows the variety in approaches and possibilities of each of the instruments. Both AISHE and PRME are qualitative and participative in nature, however AISHE is more prescriptive as it presents criteria rather than principles. AISHE presents specific opportunities to link results to a policy plan, while PRME is more oriented toward a reflective case process. EFA differs from the other instruments as it is quantitative in nature, with prescriptive indicators. The process is less

oriented towards participation and reflection, but offers concrete opportunities to include indicators and results in existing processes of campus operations.

Table 2. Key questions on the three cases

Key question		Case		
		AISHE	**EFA**	**PRME**
Q1	What approach is used in the instrument?	Qualitative	Quantitative	Qualitative
Q2	What type of information does the instrument offer?	Criteria	Indicators	Principles
Q3	What is the type of stakeholder involvement in the instrument?	Participation	Consulting	Participation
Q4	What is the contribution of the instrument to efficiency measures within the business school?	Possibility for policy plan	Possibility to include results in campus operations	Reflective change process

Source: authors' own elaboration.

5. Discussion and recommendations

The analysis of the three cases shows the variety in approaches when it comes to embedding sustainability within an organisations' context. The tools and instruments show several possibilities for business schools to focus on the topic and apply them on campus by means of living laboratory. AISHE has been developed specifically for HEIs, and offers opportunities to link the results of the sustainability assessment to further policy initiatives. The EFA tool could be used to focus on a specific topic, i.e. ecological efficiency, and furthermore has the potential to be linked to existing processes within the campus operations. The PRME principles provide guidance to embed sustainability issues within the business schools' context, and are more reflective in nature.

What should be underlined about the application of these tools, is that the choice of one tool has not to be seen as absolute, as several tools and instruments may be combined. Within UCLL, the qualitative, educational focus of AISHE has been supplemented by the quantitative approach oriented towards campus operations (Lambrechts and Van Liedekerke 2014). Also, the measurement of environmental indicators is a topic mentioned by UN PRME signatories when reporting about their efforts to integrate the principles (Godemann et al. 2014). In other words, using and combining the results of various tools and instruments can be encouraged, as this leads

to a diverse view of sustainability measures and stakeholder involvement, much needed within the multi-faceted nature of sustainability and CSR

The three instruments have potential to be connected to efficiency measures in business schools, specifically within the framework of sustainability and CSR. Furthermore, it is a way to align efforts within the business context, in which the discourse has already been oriented towards a triple bottom line approach. In other words, the application of these tools can help to integrate competences for SD, specifically needed within the context of CSR, as described by van Kleef and Roome (2007).

The process-oriented approach of AISHE offers opportunities to involve different stakeholders of the business school, even external organisations and partners, and may in this regard be seen as a practical approach to apply stakeholder management within the educational sector. Furthermore, as the link between ESD and quality assurance is seen as an important step within the integration of SD in higher education (Vettori and Rammel 2014), the quality management approach AISHE, based on EFQM, could offer opportunities to enhance this process.

The quantitative indicators of the EFA could lead to specific integration of certain efficiency measures within the campus operations, although they only focus on eco-efficiency. In the case of UCLL, specific scenarios for future action were developed. It is however unclear how and to what extent the results of the EFA and the scenarios have actually been embedded within the campus operations, as a follow up analysis has not yet been made.

The PRME offer a more flexible and reflective framework, and could be used to report on other efficiency measures as well. In this sense, it could be interpreted as a tool to guide a sustainability reporting process, in which other initiatives like the EFA and AISHE results could be integrated. The PRME could trigger policy makers to make a clear statement and take considerable actions, and offers possibilities for the business school to communicate to external stakeholders.

6. Conclusion

This article explored the possibilities to use sustainability (assessment) tools within the context of business schools. The results of the critical case analysis pointed to specific opportunities and advantages to link these efforts to efficiency measures on campus as a living laboratory. The three cases showed that the involvement of stakeholders is enhanced, in some more extensive than others. Furthermore, the results offered possibilities to link to policy development, or to integrate efficiency measures in existing campus operations.

Connecting sustainability initiatives to efficiency measures also has many opportunities which are not yet fully used by their potential within the business schools' context. In the context of the campus as a living laboratory, students could be induced with the concept of sustainability measures, in an environment which is close and familiar to them. In this sense, the campus is a living lab for sustainability innovation. However, when it comes to introducing efficiency measures in its own campus operations, it seems difficult to make a real systemic change, even after tools and instruments have been applied, results reported and future plans are made. Tools and instruments have a potential to introduce sustainability measures and link them with efficiency measures. This potential is not entirely fulfilled within the HEIs' context, due to remaining barriers regarding the structure of the HEI, awareness issues and resistance against change. Without taking considerable initiatives to tackle these structural barriers to change, the application of sustainability initiatives and efficiency measures will remain at the level of mere cases and pilot projects, without being fully implemented, or without translating the results to concrete actions.

Business schools, as other HEIs, are taking considerable steps when it comes to integrating sustainability in their education, research, outreach and campus operations. However, regarding the integration of SD from the perspective of change management (e.g. Verhulst and Lambrechts 2015, in press), they are far from a structural and systemic approach. Also regarding efficiency measures, HEIs and business schools are facing new challenges set by government or accreditation bodies (Wals 2014). These challenges are not always set from a sustainability perspective, and it could pose a threat to integrate SD into the higher education system. Given their specific profile, business schools could have the advantage to connect both concepts and strengthen the process of sustainability integration and efficiency measures for sustainability.

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Łączenie inicjatyw zrównoważonego rozwoju ze środkami poprawy efektywności: szansa dla szkół biznesu

Streszczenie:

Jednym z istotnych elementów w obrębie przejścia na gospodarki zrównoważone jest sposób, w jaki szkolnictwo wyższe przygotowuje swoich studentów do ich przyszłej roli w biznesie. Aby mogli się przyczynić do społecznej odpowiedzialności biznesu w kontekście przedsiębiorstw, potrzebują konkretnych umiejętności i kompetencji związanych ze zrównoważonym rozwojem. Czerpiąc swoje założenia ze społecznej roli szkół biznesu w przygotowywaniu przyszłych liderów biznesu i przedsiębiorców, głównym tematem tego artykułu jest wkład szkół

biznesu w integrację zrównoważonego rozwoju. Ten wątek może być szerzej umieszczony w kontekście szkolnictwa wyższego w zakresie zrównoważonego rozwoju, którego celem jest włączenie nauczania kompetencji w zakresie zrównoważonego rozwoju do programu nauczania oraz integracja środków zrównoważonego rozwoju w ramach działalności kampusu, badań i roli społecznej. Ten przeglądowy artykuł skupia się na szkołach biznesu w kontekście stanowienia przykładu instytucjonalnych działań na rzecz poprawy efektywności. Opisuje on w jaki sposób szkoły mogą wdrażać środki poprawy efektywności i stosować instrumenty na swoim własnym przykładzie, patrząc na kampus, jak na „żywe laboratorium" dla innowacyjnych rozwiązań zrównoważonego rozwoju. Opisano tu trzy narzędzia i instrumenty wspierania integracji zrównoważonego rozwoju na terenie kampusu, płynące z nich korzyści i możliwe problemy: instrument oceny dla zrównoważonego rozwoju w szkolnictwie wyższym, analiza śladu ekologicznego oraz zasady odpowiedzialnego kształcenia menedżerów (PRME). Artykuł opiera się na danych i wynikach kilku projektów badawczych prowadzonych w ramach dwóch belgijskich szkół biznesu. Podsumowując, artykuł stanowi refleksję nad kluczowymi cechami tych inicjatyw będących sposobem na połączenie inicjatyw zrównoważonego rozwoju z środkami poprawy efektywności. To może być szansa dla szkół biznesu, które jeszcze nie wykorzystały swojego pełnego potencjału.

Słowa kluczowe: AISHE, szkoły biznesu, analiza śladu ekologicznego, środki poprawy efektywności, szkolnictwo wyższe, PRME, zrównoważony rozwój.
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